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Volume 1, Number 9 **September 15, 1993**

Great Lakes Continue Water Level Declines

Normal August precipitation on the Great Lakes Basin allowed water levels of the Great Lakes to continue their seasonal declines.

"As usual, Lake Superior was the last of the lakes to reach its peak level for the year, and this occurred in early September," explained Ralph Moulton, Manager of Environment Canada's Great Lakes Water Level Communications Centre.

"The decline in water levels is expected to continue on all the Great Lakes through the fall months."

Although they are declining, levels of all the lakes are above their average levels.

Lake Superior began September at 8cm above its long-term average for the time of year; Lake Huron began the month at 29 cm higher; Lake St. Clair, at 43 cm higher (1900-1991 average); Lake Erie began the month at 31 cm above average; and, Lake Ontario was 4cm above its beginning of September average. (The figure for Lake St. Clair is different than that shown on the Monthly Water Level Bulletin. The Bulletin uses a 1961-1992 average, which is higher than the 1900-1991 average.)

Assuming the most probable water supplies over the next six months, the levels of Lakes Superior, Huron, St. Clair and Erie are forecast to remain above their seasonal averages. Lake Ontario is forecast to decline below its average this month and to remain below average until January, when its seasonal rise is expected to begin. If water supplies are significantly higher or lower, levels could rise above or fall below those forecast.

Lake St. Lawrence Levels Cause Boating Problems

People using the Lake St. Lawrence section of the St. Lawrence River (Between Cornwall and Iroquois) were advised in late August of very low water levels.

By August 20, the water level had fallen to 60 cm below average at Long Sault, very close to its 1987 record low. These low levels decreased depths for boating, and the effects were felt as far upstream as Wolfe Island near

Kingston.

The low levels caused previously well submerged objects to be closer to the surface. In some locations, the water level was too low to allow boats to be taken into or out of the water. Others struck bottom or sustained damage to their propellers.

On August 23 and 26, the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control authorized decreases in the outflow from Lake Ontario. These actions were intended to help increase the level in the river upstream of the power dam at Cornwall. The Board agreed to continue a flow reduction for the remainder of the recreational boating season (until approximately Sept. 24). By September 7, the Long Sault level had risen by about 30 cm.

Lake Ontario's outflow is regulated by adjusting the flow through the Moses-Saunders hydropower dam at Cornwall. Regulation activity is supervised by the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control, a Canada-U.S. board of the International Joint Commission.

The recent extremely low river levels on Lake St. Lawrence were a result of higher-than-normal outflows that were authorized earlier this year in an effort to lower Lake Ontario's level, which was approaching its previous record high. As the high outflows continued through the summer and the lake's level dropped to near average, water levels in the St. Lawrence River also declined.

International Joint Commission Reviewing Water Levels Study

A report recommending 42 government actions to alleviate problems associated with fluctuating water levels on the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River is under review by the International Joint Commission.

The report, prepared by a Canada-U.S. Levels Reference Study Board, was submitted to the Commission on March 31. The Commission held a public hearing in Windsor on September 11, and further public comment was accepted until September 15.

Based upon its review and the comments received, the Commission will make its own report to the Governments of Canada and the United States. The two governments requested a study into fluctuating water levels in 1986, when water levels on all of the lakes except Lake Ontario were at record highs for the century. Copies of the report are available from:

International Joint Commission
100 Metcalfe Street, 18th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5M1
Tel. (613) 995-2984

Montréal Harbour Drops in August

Reduced outflows from Lake Ontario, combined with lower flows from the Ottawa River and other local tributaries resulted in a drop in Montréal Harbour's level. The harbour's monthly mean level for August was 17 cm lower than that

of the previous month. However, this level was still 26 cm higher than the level recorded in the same period last year.

The harbour began September at 80 cm above chart datum. Under the most probable supply conditions, the Harbour is forecast to fall below average this month and remain below average for the remainder of the six-month forecast period. The graph of the forecast provided in the Monthly Water Level Bulletin does not take into account flow resistance that could be caused by winter ice. Therefore, actual winter levels at Montréal could be higher than those indicated on the graph.

We Hope You Like Our New Information Format

We have changed the format of our information on Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River water levels. We plan to continue providing you with regular updates and water level forecasts, and we hope to expand our information when appropriate.

You will continue to receive the Canadian Hydrographic Service "Water Level Bulletin" monthly. However, this information letter will be issued less frequently, as situations warrant; such as, the fall, winter and spring storm seasons.

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URL: http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/water/level-news/leveln-sep93.html